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REDDIT AMA BY PETER MANSOOR TAKES READERS BEHIND IRAQ SURGE



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"I am Colonel (Retired) Peter Mansoor, former executive officer to General David Petraeus during the surge in Iraq and now a professor of military history at The Ohio State University. AMA."



So began Mershon affiliate **Peter Mansoor's AMA** – or Ask Me Anything – one of the most popular features on the social site Reddit. In an AMA, one person answers questions from online participants. Although anyone can conduct an AMA, the most popular ones are with notable people such as President Obama, Madonna, Bill Gates, Rachel Maddow, and Roger Ebert.

Mansoor got talked into doing an AMA by his daughter Kyle, 25, and son J.T., 19. "They are big fans of Reddit, and ... they felt my story would be compelling," he said.

Compelling, it was. In his AMA, Mansoor gave Redditors a look behind the scenes of the surge in Iraq and discussed his candid views of colleagues in the Iraq War and issues in the military.

Questions ranged from whether the war in Afghanistan was winnable, to the leadership of Donald Rumsfeld, to how to address PTSD.

Unlike most AMA conductors, Mansoor spent an entire day answering questions. His AMA garnered 3,478 comments and more than 23,000 up and down votes. Some questions and answers include:

Q. What do you believe to be the greatest threat against the US?

A. Collapse from within - the increasingly polarization of our domestic politics. We need to find common ground and work from the middle outward, not the extremes inward.

Q. Do you think that the war in Afghanistan is or was winnable?

A. I think the United States had to fight the war in Afghanistan, but we took our eye off the real objective, which was the destruction of Al Qaeda. The mishandling of the fight at Tora Bora in 2001 was incompetence at its finest. The Bush administration then took its eye off the ball again through its ill-considered invasion of Iraq, leaving Afghanistan to fester.

Q. Your book *Surge* has harsh words for Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, stating that he “rightly” offered his resignation after the Abu Ghraib scandal and President Bush was wrong not to accept it. ... What are the biggest lessons future Pentagon leaders should learn to avoid being another Rumsfeld?

A. Senior leaders must be willing to listen. Rumsfeld thinks he was open to criticism, but he was not. If a leader cannot listen to contrary opinions and make informed decisions based on a full range of views, then he/she courts disaster - as Rumsfeld did in Iraq.

Abu Ghraib was a moral failing of the U.S. military that should have resulted in the resignation of the Secretary of Defense. President Bush was faithful to his subordinates to a fault. He should have let Rumsfeld go in the spring of 2004 and put different leadership in place in the Pentagon.

Q. What is your opinion on the treatment of veterans with PTSD? Do you think that enough is being done?

A. Perhaps the greatest need is to provide a way to help military personnel make sense of what they have gone through and put

their experiences into some sort of context that helps them sort out their memories and emotions.


I'm really excited that The Ohio State University offers one such program for veterans, called the Veterans Learning Community. ... Central to this program is a comparative studies course entitled "Experiences of War." In this course, students are exposed to representations of the experience of war in art, literature, and film from diverse cultures and time periods. The course has been a huge hit, and it has enabled combat veterans to filter their experiences through the lens of others throughout history who have also gone to war.

Overall Redditors seemed happy with the AMA, with many of them giving it a 10 out of 10. "You should run for president!" one participant told Mansoor.

Mansoor also enjoyed the experience. "My major goal was to continue to tell the story of the Iraq War and in particular the surge of 2007-08," he said. "There is a lot of misinformation in the public regarding these events. But the questions I received spanned a much broader sphere of interest."

The entire Reddit AMA can be found at <http://redd.it/1uba7f>.

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